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AUTHOR Hensley, Wayne E.
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ABSTRACT

Three distinct theoretical explanations for the effect of attire on aiding behavior were examined in a study. The reinforcing value of attire itself predicted that well-dressed persons would always receive more assistance than poorly dressed persons. The reinforcing value of perceived similarity predicted that similar persons would receive more assistance than dissimilar persons. Balance theory predicted that dissimilar persons would receive more assistance than similar persons. Seventeen female college students who were well-dressed or poorly dressed approached both males and females in an airport or bus station asking for a dime to complete a telephone call. Well-dressed students received more money at the airport; poorly dressed students received more money at the bus station. The results were interpreted as support for the similarity hypothesis. (Author)

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SAY BUDDY, CAN YOU SPARE A DIME?: AN EXAMINATION OF THE EFFECTS OF ATTIRE, LOCATION AND SEX ON AIDING BEHAVIOR

Wayne E. Hensley

University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee

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Abstract

This study examined three distinct theoretical explanations for the effect of attire on aiding behavior. The reinforcing value of attire itself predicted that well dressed persons would always receive more assistance than poorly dressed persons. The reinforcing value of perceived similarity predicted that similar persons would receive more assistance than dissimilar persons. Balance theory predicted that dissimilar persons would receive more assistance than similar persons. Female experimenters (N = 17) who were well dressed or poorly dressed approached males and females in an airport or bus station asking for a dime to complete a telephone call. Well dressed experimenters received more money at the airport; poorly dressed experimenters received more money at the bus station. These results were interpreted as support for the similarity hypothesis.

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Say Buddy, Can You Spare a Dime?: An Examination of the Effects of Attire, Location and Sex on Aiding Behavior

When we first encounter another individual, we make several immediate observations. Our first glance reveals the other persons' sex, race, approximate age, and apparel. Before a word is spoken, we have some visual data upon which to base our estimate of the other individual. Even though these clues may be subtle and sometimes fleeting, initial impressions are both common and telling (Hastorf, Schnieder & Polefda, 1970). Granting the importance of initial impressions, is there anything we can do to affect them? We surely cannot change our sex at will; our race is set; the impression of age may be altered only minimally. Of the factors mentioned above, only attire may be modified to fit our mood or the occasion.

The importance of clothing choices on first impressions is underscored by the general public's acceptance of books providing advice on attire for the man (Molloy, 1975) or woman (Molloy, 1977) desiring to succeed in the world of business. Moreover, the general public does not seem to be alone in the belief that clothing is an important factor in personal presentation. There are a growing number of scholarly sources who endorse the idea that the "meaning" of attire is, in fact, a message to the world concerning the individual (Burgoon & Saine, 1978, p. 149; Gibbins, 1969; Gibbins & Gwynne, 1975; Harrison, 1974, pp. 147-148; Kelley, 1969; Knapp, 1978, pp. 175-180; Leathers, 1976, pp. 95-98; Rosenfeld & Plax, 1977).

One line of research concerning attire has focused on reinforcement theory. The assumption is that attire affects our perceptions of

similarity or hoped for similarity between ourselves and the well dressed person. The perception of similarity thus influences our subsequent behavior. In a larger sense, it is gratifying to see others confirming our good taste and judgment in clothing. The fact that the choose attire similar to our own means that our choices are fashionable enough for them also.

Like much other behavioral theory, reinforcement has its roots in antiquity. As Aristotle wrote in the Rhetoric, we favor those "who praise such good qualities as we possess, and especially if they praise the good qualities that we are not too sure we do possess. And toward those who are cleanly in their person, their dress . . ." (II, 4, 1381b). While there are detailed statements of the modern version of reinforcement theory available elsewhere (Byrne, 1971), perhaps it will suffice to say that the classic definition of a reinforcer (UCS) is anything which will enhance the probability of the occurrence of a response with which it is paired. As we shall see, well dressed persons fit into this paradigm quite well.

One study of the reinforcement genre (Schiavo, Sherlock & Wicklund, 1974) asked middle-aged women for directions to a well known restaurant. The experimenters were two women who were either well dressed i.e. "skirt, blouse, heels, hand bag, groomed hair" or poorly dressed i.e. "oversized tee-shirt, Army jacket, jeans, sneakers, ungroomed hair." The results pointed to the fact that the middle-aged women were more likely to give detailed directions or to offer helpful suggestions to the well dressed women than to the poorly dressed women.

Another field study (Bickman, 1974) sampled in Grand Central Station and John F. Kennedy Airport. The experimenters, three males and three

females, followed a set pattern. The experimenter would enter a phone booth and place a dime on the shelf beneath the phone. (S)he would then retire to await the next person to use the phone. Two minutes after the unsuspecting phone patron had entered the booth, the experimenter would approach, tap on the glass and say, "Excuse me, . . . I think I might've left a dime in this phone booth . . . Did you find it?" The only factor to make any difference in the return of the dime was how the experimenter was attired. Well dressed experimenters got the dime back 77% of the time, poorly dressed experimenters only 38% of the time.

These studies, and a host of others (Chaikin, Derlega, Yoder & Phillips, 1974; Crassweller, Gordon & Tedford, 1972; Darley & Cooper, 1972; Harris & Bays, 1973; Raymond & Unger, 1971; Suedfeld, Bochner & Matas, 1971; Suedfeld, Bochner & Wnek, 1972), all demonstrate that persons who are well dressed invariably receive more assistance or are more often granted small favors than are those who are poorly dressed. It is to be strongly emphasized that all of the studies cited are field investigations of the nonverbal effects of clothing. Thus, it may not be argued that these findings are laboratory phenomenon and do not reflect actual human behavior: this <u>is</u> actual behavior. Harking back to our earlier discussion of a reinforcer (UCS), it is now apparent that being well dressed indeed enhances the probability of receiving a small favor after such a request has been made. In the social sense, these studies seem to argue that attire functions as a reinforcing element in human interaction.

The problem to be noted in the reinforcement approach is a conceptual one. Reinforcement theory might be used in <u>two</u> very different ways to explain these results. First, it could be that attire per se is the

element causing the reinforcement. Perhaps it is pleasing just to be in the company of persons who are well dressed. Or, second, perhaps it is the similarity or the hoped for similarity between ourselves and the well dressed person which is reinforcing. That is, is dressing well itself the reinforcing agent, or is similarity between the observer and the observed the reinforcing agent? Most, if not all, of the above literature confounds rather than clarifies this question.

Setting aside this conceptual dilemma for a moment, there is yet a third and totally different way to view the message of attire. True, the evidence thus far presented supports the proposition that rewards are forthcoming to those who are acceptably attired and are withheld from those unacceptably attired. As we have noted, this may be because of either (1) the attire itself or (2) the perception of similarity created by the attire. In either case, pleasing attire appears to be a reinforcer yielding predictable results. On the other hand, convincing as these data may seem at first blush, there is an impressive body of literature which suggests that, under some circumstances, similarity may promote derision (Hornstein, 1970; Mettee & Wilkins, 1972; Taylor & Mettee, 1971; Senn, 1971).

As a case in point Taylor and Mettee (1971) paired two females, one a naive subject and the other a confederate, in a study of impression formation. Half of the naive subjects were led to believe, on the basis of personality tests previously completed, that the other female was very much like them. The other half were told that their partner was quite different from them. What the naive volunteer did not know was that the confederate had been programmed to react in either a pleasant or an obnoxious manner.

In total, then, there were four conditions: similar and pleasant, similar and obnoxious, dissimilar and pleasant, and dissimilar and obnoxious. After interaction, the subjects were asked to indicate how much they liked the confederate. The strongest negative reaction was toward the similar-obnoxious partner. The strongest positive reaction was toward the similar-pleasant partner. The dissimilar conditions fell in the middle.

This study, and others as well (Hornstein, 1970; Mettee & Wilkins, 1972; Senn, 1971) indicates that similarity is a double edged sword. While we may be strongly attracted to a similar other, we may also be strongly repelled. The explanation which has been advanced to explain these findings is that of balance theory.

In the context of balance theory (Heider, 1958; Newcomb, 1956) a classic triangle is often encountered in which A represents the actor, B represents the other person and X represents some attribute (Figure 1). The A-X relationship in this case is negative since obnoxiousness is not a

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Insert Figure 1 about here

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desirable personal attribute. However, the other person possesses this attribute (B-X). Therefore, to achieve balance, we must reject the other person. In fact, we would strongly suspect that even greater distress would be caused by our perception that the obnoxious person was similar rather than dissimilar. After all, if this person is a carbon copy of us and is obnoxious, what does that say about us? Festinger's (1954) social comparison theory even predicts that the greater the perceived similarity of the other person, the more salient the attribute(s) possessed by the

other person.[1] It is worth noting that time (causal) order is an important element here. Taylor and Mettee (1971) conducted their similar-dissimilar manipulation prior to the pleasant-obnoxious manipulation. Thus, the correspondence between the two persons was established before the confederate behaved pleasantly or unpleasantly. Hence, by social comparison (balance) theory, we would predict greater disparagement for the similar-obnoxious person than for the dissimilar-obnoxious person. This is the observed result. Further, Taylor and Mettee (1971) examined the hypothesis that attribute(s) possessed by a similar other take on greater salience than for a dissimilar other. Their data confirmed that the rejection of the similar-obnoxious other was based, at least in part, on the "fear of possessing the undesirable trait" /ourselves/. (Taylor & Mettee, 1971, p. 75).

The usefulness of balance theory does not end here. It is possible to explain the results of being well dressed in a balance theory context (Figure 2). In this case the A-X relationship is between us and the

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Insert Figure 2 about here

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attribute of being well dressed. As Figure 2 shows, this relationship is positive. The B-X relationship is also positive since the other person possesses the attribute; (s)he is well dressed. Again, time (causal) order is important. It must be assumed that the positive evaluation of dressing well existed before the other person was encountered. Also observe that the other person's appearance preceeds any evaluation of him/her. Hence, the only remaining relationship, which we must supply, is what sort of relationship (evaluation) will exist between us and the other person.

If we are the sort of person who dresses well or who desires to dress well, then this other person must be an individual like ourselves. Hence, balance theory predicts that cognitive balance will obtain only if we react positively. Once more, this is exactly what the research has shown.

We are now faced with a situation in which balance theory and two versions of reinforcement theory are all able to explain an observed set of studies. The question is which of them is most appropriate to the message of attire in a given setting. The present study proposes to investigate this theoretical dilemma via a field study. Experimenters who are well or poorly dressed will approach males and females in a high cost or a low cost mass transportation facility. All experimenters will request a small favor of these passersby. The nature of the favor will, however, reveal a failing on the part of the experimenter. In this situation, there are three separate hypotheses which could be predicted for the possible outcome, one for each of the competing theories.

Reinforcement

Reference to Figure 3 will illustrate that if the reinforcing effect is totally due to attire itself, then the well dressed person will receive more favors than the poorly dressed person ($R_1 < R_2$).

Insert Figure 3 about here

Similarity

The idea of similarity predicts that we are predisposed to aid those most like ourselves. In this particular case, travelers in the airport will

aid the well dressed person more than the poorly dressed person. Further, travelers at the bus station will aid the poorly dressed person more than the well dressed person $(b+c) < (a+d)$.

Balance

It is generally assumed that the person who comes to a mass transportation facility should be prepared for his/her trip. The fact that one has not thought ahead indicates a lack of preparedness -- a negative attribute. Since balance theory has shown that similar others are harshly judged when they possess undesirable attributes, the prediction is that travelers in the airport will aid the poorly dressed person more than they will the well dressed person. Further, travelers at the bus station will aid the well dressed person more than they will the poorly dressed person $(a+d) < (b+c)$.

Method

Subjects

The subjects for this study were passersby in two mass transportation facilities located in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. No subject was ever aware of being part of an investigation. Due to the field nature of the investigation, none of the subjects were debriefed concerning the true nature of the study.

Experimenters

The experimenters were 17 female college students enrolled in a nonverbal communication course. Each experimenter gathered the data as a part of a class assignment for the course. All experimenters were aware that

well dressed persons seem to receive more favors than poorly dressed persons but none knew the specific hypotheses under investigation.

All the experimenters were attractive female college students with a mean age of 24.06. Since each experimenter supplied her own "uniform," only a typical mode of attire will be described. The well dressed version was: skirt and jacket, blouse, hose and shoes put together to form a pleasing color match. In addition, a briefcase, attache case and/or shoulder bag was always carried. The characteristic sought in the well dressed condition was that of a female executive. The poorly dressed version was: faded and patched bluejeans or cutoffs, teeshirt and/or blouse with several noticable mends with sandals or sneakers. The characteristic sought in the poorly dressed condition was a clean but tattered look.

Procedure

All sampling was done at the Milwaukee International Airport terminal - Billy Mitchell Field -- or at the Milwaukee Bus Station. Each experimenter stationed herself at or near a public telephone. When a person of the appropriate gender approached, she would remove the telephone from the hook, then walk up to the subject and say ,"Excuse me but I'm making a very important telephone call and I only have one dime. Could you please loan me a dime?" If the person complied, she would return to the phone and actually deposit the dime in the phone. At the same time, each experimenter would simulate a conversation. The simulated conversation gave the experimenter a chance to record the location, her mode of dress, the

gender of the person approached, the race of the person approached, the verbatim comments made by the person and whether or not she received the dime.

Using this general procedure, each experimenter approached one male and one female in each location wearing each mode of dress. The sampling instructions called for the ascertainment of the appropriate gender of the person to be approached. The experimenter would then take her post and approach the second person of that gender passing by.

Results

Reliability

As a safety precaution, no woman in this study ever sampled alone. The strong possibility was foreseen that some males might misunderstand the request for a dime and attempt to offer more assistance than was actually requested. To forestall such an occurrence, another experimenter was always present and watching from a distance. In the event that some male had become amorous, the other experimenter could have "accidentally" run into the partner in trouble thus enabling the two of them to retire from this embarrassing scene with a modicum of grace. (Interestingly, and thankfully, this situation never occurred. No male ever made any untoward advances.) On the other hand, this procedure also served as a reliability check on the data gathered. No doubt one frequently reads a study in which data are gathered by a number of observers. It is always a matter of conjecture whether every investigator gathered every observation. In fact, the question of falsified data may be more common than we care to admit. In the present case, the presence of another student observer served to authenticate the data in hand.

Validity

There is yet another element present which bears mentioning. We have known for some time that attractive persons seem to receive more rewards in life than unattractive persons (Berscheid & Walster, 1974). For the most part, previous studies of attire have failed to control for attractiveness and hence may have been partially confounded in this sense. The problem becomes critical as the number of experimenters becomes small. A team of very attractive experimenters might obtain quite different results than a team of unattractive experimenters. There is no way to ascertain how many of the responses attributed to attire are actually based on a winning smile, interpersonal warmth or even an ample bosom. The problem is focused more clearly if we consider that some studies have used only one experimenter (Chaikin, et. al., 1974; Crassweller, et. al., 1972), others have used two experimenters (Harris & Bays, 1973; Schiavo, et. al., 1974; Suedfeld, et. al., 1971) and only a few have used four or more experimenters (Bickman, 1974; Suedfeld, et. al., 1972).

One means of controlling for the intervening effects of attractiveness would be to obtain attractiveness ratings from all respondents and then apply statistical controls. In field studies this method is highly impractical. The other method, used in the present investigation, is to use a sufficiently large number of experimenters to offset the effects of one or two who might be particularly attractive. With 17 experimenters, all serving in every combination of attire, it is extremely unlikely that our results are contaminated by any systematic response to attractiveness or personality.

Analysis

The primary analysis was accomplished via a three-way analysis of variance with sex of the person approached, type of attire, and location as the main elements. These data clearly indicate a rejection of the

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Insert Table 1 about here

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reinforcement hypothesis. When the women were well dressed, they received an average of $.079. The same women poorly dressed received $.074. This difference is not significant (F (1,128) = .70; p = .41). It is not the case that better dress always obtains a more favorable response.

In order for either the similarity hypothesis or the balance hypothesis to be accepted, the interaction between dress and location must be significant. It is (F (1,128) = 4.35; $p < .05$). In addition, the direction of the interaction confirmed that it was the similarity hypothesis which was the explanatory theory.

The well dressed women received $.088 at the airport; the same women when poorly dressed received an average of $.068. At the bus station the poorly dressed women received $.079 versus $.071 when well dressed. Combining the data into similar and dissimilar categories revealed that overall the similar conditions -- well dressed at the airport plus poorly dressed at the bus station -- averaged $.084. The dissimilar conditions -- poorly dressed at the airport plus well dressed at the bus station -- averaged only $.069. This is a significant difference (t = 2.04; df = 135; $p < .025$).

It is also worth noting, even if in passing, that we obtained a

strong main effect from the variable of sex. Males offered assistance significantly more often ($.087) than did females ($.066). This difference was highly significant (F (1,128) = 8.52; $p < .005$).

Discussion

Before we raise the flag for similarity too high, it would be wise to ascertain if the other two theories actually had a chance to operate. In the case of reinforcement due to attire per se, the evidence seems to be fairly unequivocal. If persons in better dress always and everywhere obtain more favors from others, then that result should have emerged here. The fact that we did not obtain such a result rejects this theory with a fair degree of certainty, at least for this situation.

Balance theory, on the other hand, would have operated only if the failing exhibited by the experimenters was perceived as a failing. Evidence on this perception is far from conclusive. For each subject the verbatim comments made to the experimenters were recorded. A great many persons seemed honestly stunned that someone would be asking for a dime. Looking a typical comments made to the well dressed experimenters most expressed some degree of surprise. For example, a sixtyish lady at the airport said, "Give you a . . .? (She found the dime in her purse and handed it to E.)" A fourtyish man at the airport responded, "(Looked E over very carefully, then said) Sure." The comments recorded disclosed that travelers did regard the request for a dime as unusual but the dime was usually forthcoming anyway. It is possible that a well dressed person asking for money was sufficiently unusual that we may have encountered a "novelty" effect. In short, balance theory failed to operate in this study and may be rejected -- but not with as much certainty as the data might first indicate.

It would be tempting at this point to assert that our experimenters received aid more often from men than from women because the experimenters were all young and attractive females. No doubt there is some element of truth in this assertion. On the other hand, earlier investigations of the effect of attire have demonstrated that male shoppers offered more assistance than female shoppers to well dressed female experimenters in a discount store (Harris & Bays, 1973) and male drivers more often than female drivers offered rides to a well dressed male hitchhiker (Crassweller, et. al., 1972). These two studies, as well as the present investigation, fly in the face of other data which suggests that it is the female who offers aid to dependent others, not the male (Midlarsky, 1968).

At this point the most likely explanation for these findings may lie in the nature of the task itself. Harris and Bays (1973) found that men responded more than women to a request for help with a stuck shopping cart. Crassweller et. al., (1972) observed that men offered more rides to a hitchhiker than did women. The present study has shown that men responded in greater numbers than women to the request for money. All of these requests, to some extent or another, may be construed as male appropriate endeavors. It remains to be seen whether males would provide more assistance for a clearly female appropriate endeavor e.g. help in threading a needle or a request to supply a recipe. If this speculation is correct and future research demonstrates there are specific types of tasks to which males and females differentially respond, we will have added an important caveat to the knowledge of sex based aiding behavior.

In sum, a number of conclusions seem to emerge from these data. These results seem to corroborate rather clearly the fact that attire does

indeed project a "message" to the rest of the world. The reception and interpretation of this message is, however, more convoluted than we had thought. It is not the case that the well dressed person always and everywhere receives more aid from others than a poorly dressed person. Rather, the message of attire most often resulting in a favorable response from others is that of similarity. Moreover, the speculation has been advanced that assistance in a given situation may depend more on what sort of aid is requested than on who is being asked for the aid. Once more we have found that a clear and simple request -- "Say Buddy, can you spare a dime?" -- is neither clear nor simple in the dynamics of its operation.

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Footnotes

[1]The difference between balance and social comparison theory is more apparent than real. Social comparison is, in fact, a form of balance.

TABLE 1

Analysis of Variance of

Dress, Location and Subject Sex

Source	df	Mean Square	F
A: Dress	1	.0012	.70
B: Location	1	.0003	.17
C: Sex of subject	1	.0144	8.52***
A x B	1	.0074	4.35*
A x C	1	.0026	1.57
B x C	1	.0012	.70
A x B x C	1	.0012	.70
Residual	128	.0017	
Total	135	.0018	

*p < .05
**p < .01
***p < .005

FIGURE 1

Balance Theory Diagram of

Similar Other Rejection

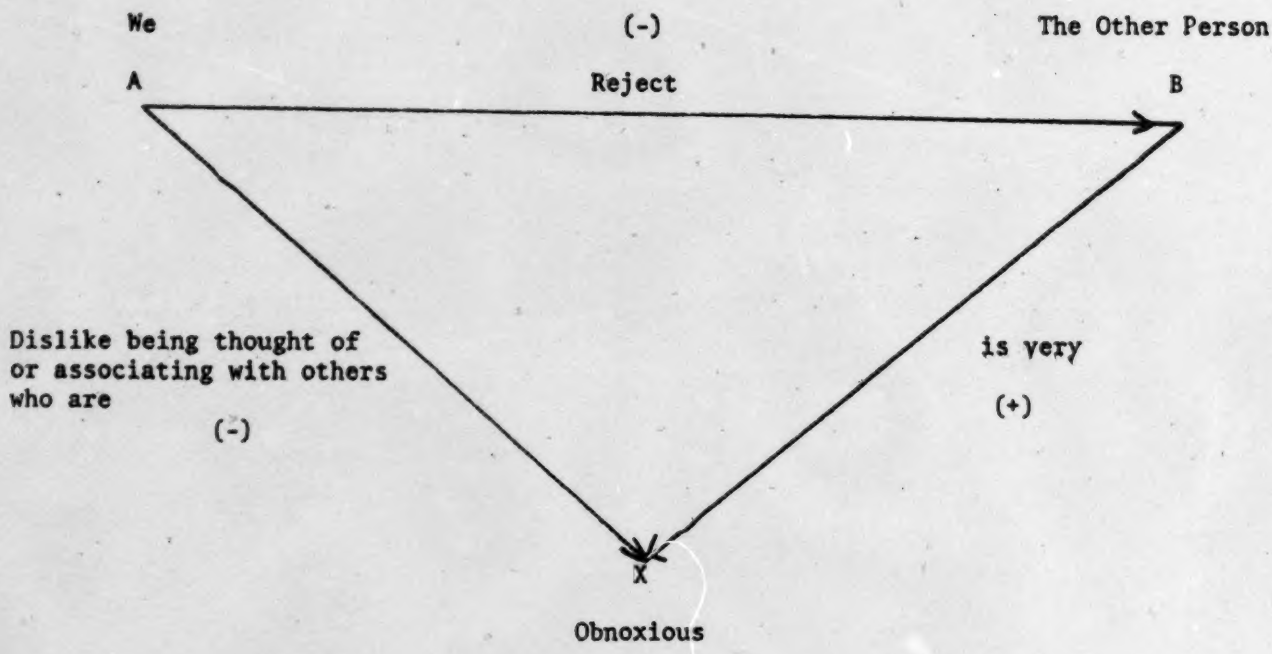

FIGURE 2

Balance Theory Diagram of

Approval of the Well Dressed

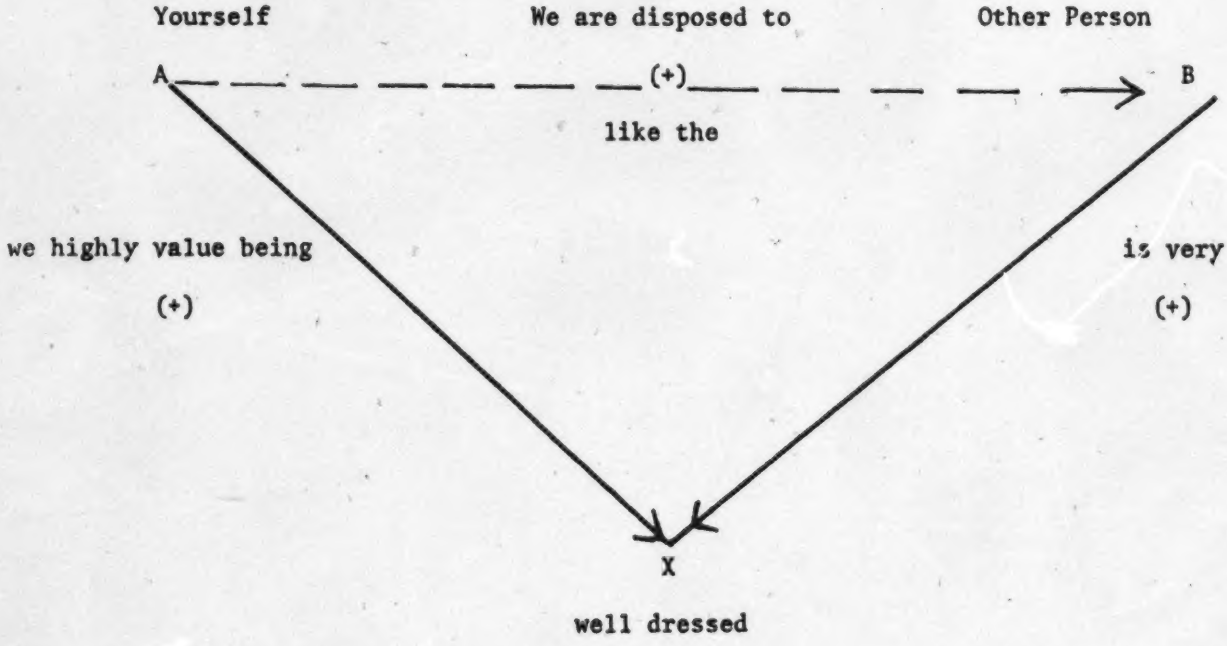

FIGURE 3

Sampling Schema Used in the

Present Investigation

Transportation Facility

Attire	High Cost	Low Cost	
Well dressed	a (similar)	b (dissimilar)	R_1
Poorly dressed	c (dissimiliar)	d (similar)	R_2